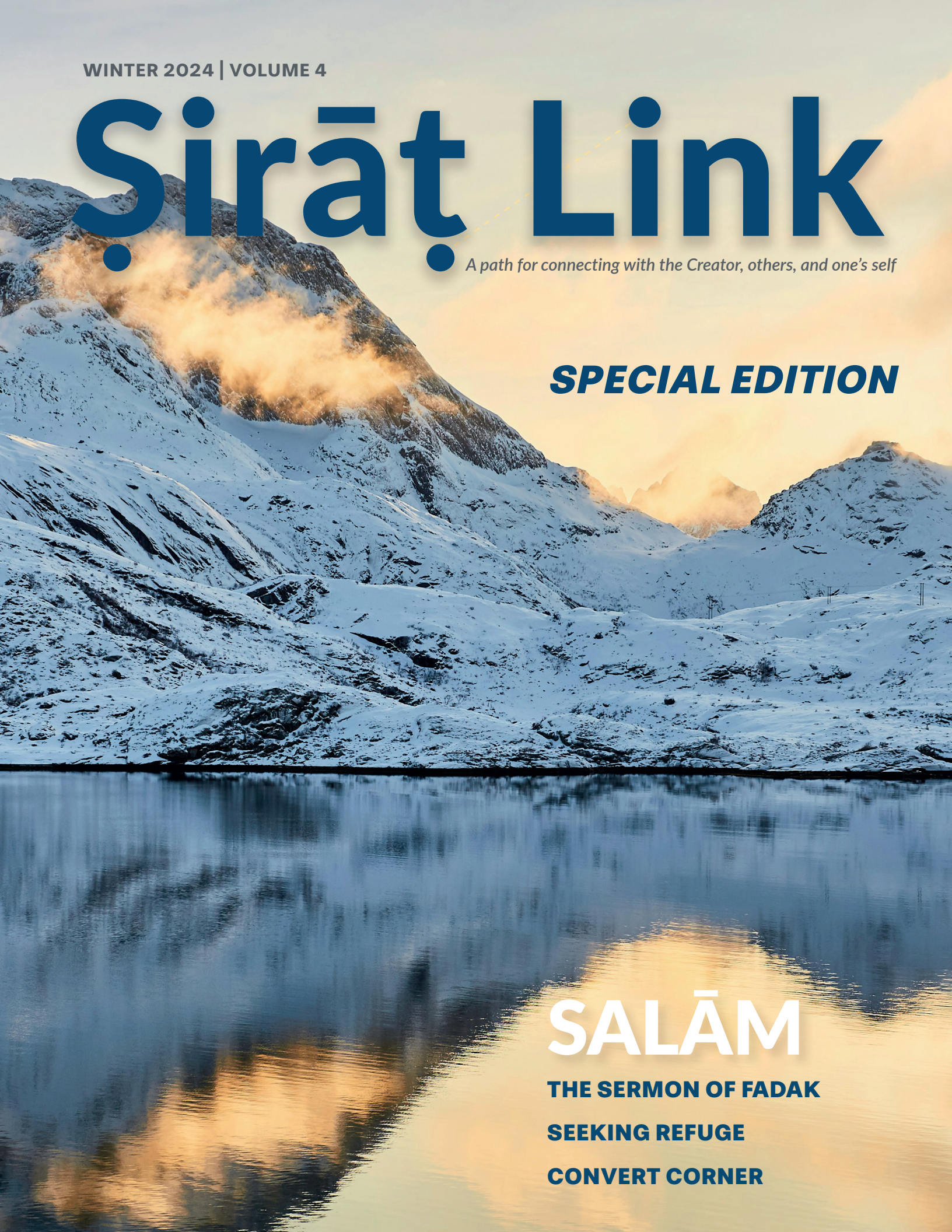
WINTER 2024 | VOLUME 4

Ṣirāṭ Link

A path for connecting with the Creator, others, and one's self



SPECIAL EDITION

SALĀM

THE SERMON OF FADAK

SEEKING REFUGE

CONVERT CORNER

Letter from MOULANA ABIDI

Salāmun ʿAlaykum,

May Allah (swt) bless you and your families. Our sincerest condolences to the Imām of our time, Imām Mahdī (ʿaj), our great marājiʿ and scholars, the Muslim Ummah, and all the believers on the commemoration of Sayyidah Fāṭimah's martyrdom (*shahādah*).

The months of Jumādā al-Ūlā and Jumādā al-Ukhrā are the months of preparation and purification. These two months are the foundational months in which one has the opportunity to remove impurities in order to attain higher spiritual levels. They are considered full of immense goodness due to the birth and martyrdom of Sayyidah Fāṭimah az-Zahrāʾ (ʿa) falling within them.

In the Noble Qurʾān, it says that the Noble Prophet (ṣ) was *"a prophet from amongst you."* He lived amongst the people, and although he had *ʿilm al-ghayb* (knowledge of the unseen) as well as a high status in society, he lived a simple life. Just like her father, Sayyidah Fāṭimah (ʿa) also had *ʿilm al-ghayb* and a high status in society, being the daughter of the Prophet (ṣ). However, she lived a humble life and she faced all the difficulties and hardships patiently. Given her circumstances, she did not use metaphysical or spiritual means to ease her challenges.

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Ṣirāṭ Link
A 2nd Chance Books Publication

وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ
مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا

For the love of Him, they feed the needy, the orphan, and the prisoner.
(Noble Qurʾān 76:8)

2nd Chance Books is a non-profit organization that was founded in order to assist incarcerated Muslims by providing them with educational materials, tools for rehabilitation, and a support system. By responding to their numerous questions about Islam, they gain a more thorough understanding of the religion. So far, 2nd Chance has distributed over 20,000 books to inmates across the country.

Among 2nd Chance's most recent initiatives is Ṣirāṭ Link, a quarterly magazine. The title Ṣirāṭ Link, inspired by the Arabic term Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm which means the right path, presents this magazine as a means of guidance to a better connection to Allah, as well as offering the opportunity for connections with the broader community, and the improvement of one's self. Inshāʾ Allāh it can also serve as an opportunity for growing one's faith through education.

This magazine will be under the guidance and oversight of Moulana Nabi Raza Mir Abidi, Resident ʿĀlim of SABA Center, and several other scholars and experts.

After the Noble Prophet's death, she was physically and emotionally hurt, but she still stood up against injustice and fought for *ḥaqq* (truth).

Sayyidah Fāṭimah (ʿa) is a role model for us in various aspects of life. When she stood up for the *wilāyah* (vicegerency) of Imām ʿAlī (ʿa), she showed us the importance of standing for *ḥaqq*. When she sacrificed herself, her home, and her children, she showed us how to give in the way of Allah (swt). When she cared for her family and cultivated an exemplary home environment, she showed us the beauty of building a strong family system. Sayyidah Fāṭimah (ʿa) devoted her life toward God-consciousness in all circumstances, and was happy and content with Allah's decisions. She is a true role model for every person, especially our mothers and sisters.

We pray that Allah (swt) gives us the *tawfīq* to fulfill our duties and responsibilities.

JazākAllāh and Best Wishes,

Nabi R. Mir (Abidi)

Photos: freepik.com

SIGNIFICANT DAYS FOR THE MONTH OF JUMĀDĀ AL-ĀKHIRAH

3rd	Death Anniversary of Sayyidah Fāṭimah az-Zahrāʾ (ʿa)	*December 17th, 2023
13th	Death Anniversary of Umm ul-Banīn	*December 27th, 2023
20th	Birth Anniversary of Sayyidah Fāṭimah az-Zahrāʾ (ʿa)	*January 3rd, 2024

SIGNIFICANT DAYS FOR THE MONTH OF RAJAB

1st	Birth Anniversary of Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (ʿa)	*January 13th, 2024
3rd	Death Anniversary of Imām ʿAlī an-Naqī al-Hādī (ʿa)	*January 15th, 2024
10th	Birth Anniversary of Imām Muḥammad at-Taqī (ʿa)	*January 22nd, 2024
13th	Birth Anniversary of Imām ʿAlī ibn Abū Ṭālib (ʿa)	*January 25th, 2024
15th	Death Anniversary of Sayyidah Zaynab bint ʿAlī (ʿa)	*January 27th, 2024

*Please note the above Gregorian dates are only estimates; as these dates are subject to change based on moon-sighting, since the Islamic dates are according to the lunar calendar.

After Death

By Shaykh Mateen Charbonneau

The aftermath of the Noble Prophet's death was full of trials and tribulations for the Muslim Ummah and the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa). Death has a habit of revealing the inner state of people, and this, too, happened in the wake of the beloved Prophet's death.

The Noble Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) was admired by all, but when he announced that he was Allah's Messenger, many of those who formerly called him aṣ-Ṣādiq (the truthful one) and al-Amīn (the trustworthy one) turned against him. The people of Mecca saw that Islam posed a direct challenge and threat to their business and beliefs of idol-worshipping. Many of Mecca's residents harbored animosity toward him (ṣ), and some even infiltrated the religion as hypocrites waiting to seize power from him at any opportunity. Several attempts were made on the Prophet's life, such as when he was traveling back to Medina after the expedition of Tabūk. Hudhayfah, a companion of the Prophet (ṣ), was present and said, "I identified them from the marks of their camels and said to the Prophet (ṣ), 'I can tell you who they are so that you may punish them,' but the Prophet instructed me in a kind voice not to divulge their secret because it was possible that they might repent. He also added, 'If I punish them, the non-Muslims would say that now that Muḥammad has achieved power, he has made his own companions his victims.'"[1]

When the time of death approached the Prophet (ṣ), Angel Jibrāʾīl brought the Angel of Death with him. The Angel of Death knocked on the door, seeking permission to enter the house of Sayyidah Fāṭimah (ʿa), which is something he had never done before. This was out of respect for the Prophet (ṣ). He said that Allah (swt) had sent him to obey the wishes of the Messenger of Allah and that if he wished, he could take his soul or he could return without it. Angel Jibrāʾīl told the Prophet (ṣ) that Allah wishes to meet with him, whereupon the Prophet (ṣ) said, "O Angel of Death, execute your orders."[2]

When the Prophet (ṣ) was approaching his last moments, Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) walked inside the house and found the Prophet's head cradled in the lap of a handsome man. This man then asked that Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) come and take his place and allow the Prophet's head to rest on his lap. The Prophet (ṣ) woke up and told Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) that the handsome man was Jibrāʾīl. Sayyidah Fāṭimah, Imām Ḥasan, and Imām Ḥusayn gathered around the Prophet (ṣ), and he told his Ahlul Bayt (ʿa) about the tragedies that would afflict them. He told Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) to bear the sufferings patiently.[3]

After the Prophet (ṣ) passed away, what did the ummah do? They left him unburied while they fought for the power to rule. Several key members of the Islamic community went to a meeting place called Saqīfah, leaving the Prophet (ṣ) unburied, to settle the matter of leadership after him (ṣ) even though the true successor had already been appointed. Didn't they remember when the Prophet (ṣ) said *"Man kuntu mawlāhu fahādhā ʿAliyyun mawlāhu"* (Of whomsoever I am his master, then this ʿAlī is his master)? The true inheritors of the message were busy with the burial rites of the Prophet (ṣ) alongside Angel Jibrāʾīl.

The loss of the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) was the greatest calamity to afflict mankind. Sayyidah Fāṭimah (ʿa) threw herself on the body of her father, pouring her heart out. She said, *"O Father! O Mercy to the Worlds! Now the revelation has ceased. Now Jibrāʾīl has quit coming to us! O Allah, let my soul join the Prophet's soul; have mercy on me by letting me see his face, and don't prevent me from his reward and intercession."*[4]

The people were tried by this great test. Allah (swt) says, *"Do people think once they say, 'We believe' that they will be left without being put to the test? We certainly tested those before them. And in this way, Allah will clearly distinguish between those who are truthful and those who are liars."*[5]

The test was to see how people would act after the Messenger (ṣ) died. Would they hold on to the rope of Allah (swt), the one who was appointed in Ghadīr Khumm? This Divine test revealed the true nature of

1 Ayatollah Jafar Subhani, *The Message*, Ch. 53
2 Sheikh Baqir al-Qarashi, *The Life of Muhammad*, P. 556
3 Sheikh Baqir al-Qarashi, *The Life of Muhammad*, P. 556
4 Sheikh Baqir al-Qarashi, *The Life of Muhammad*, P. 558
5 Noble Qurʾān, Sūrah al-ʿAnkabūt (29), Verses 2-3

many of those who claimed to believe in Islam. It reminds one of the time when most people abandoned Prophet Mūsā's successor, Prophet Hārūn (ʿa), and accepted the golden calf. Allah (swt) warns us in the Noble Qurʾān not to fail this test and disunite:

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّـهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

All of you, united, hold fast to the rope of Allah and do not be divided[6]

ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm says in Tafsīr Qummī regarding the part of the verse that says "do not be divided," that there is a narration from Imām al-Bāqir (ʿa) where he spoke about this part of the verse, saying, ***"Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, knew that the people would divide and differ after their Prophet (ṣ); therefore, He prohibited them from dividing just as He prohibited those before them. Then, He commanded them all collectively to unite upon the wilāyah (divine authority of the family of Muḥammad (ṣ))."***[7]

Now, we must ask ourselves when we are presented with tests such as being presented with opportunities to gain power, cheat, lie, steal, use drugs or alcohol, consume ḥarām, put things before Allah (swt) and His Messenger (ṣ), ignore the Qurʾān, etc., will we pass the test? Will we hold firmly on to the rope of Allah (swt), or will we lose our grip and fall off the path? We must think of the outcome of our actions before we do them and ask ourselves: Would this action please Allah (swt) and His messenger (ṣ)? Even if we see all of mankind leaning toward a forbidden action, we must choose the path of truth, although it may be a difficult road.

While remembering the dear Messenger of Allah (ṣ), we must honor him by upholding our covenant to obey him and to follow his way in all matters, even if that means to sacrifice worldly gains or something that may seem appealing to us at the time. Let us remember the many Muslims who were alongside the Prophet (ṣ), yet abandoned his way after his death, and pledge to never be from this category.

To do this, we must implement the teachings of the Noble Qurʾān and ***sunnah*** (example) of the Prophet (ṣ). When we read something from these two, we must strive to implement the advice or lesson we gain from it. This takes struggle, and it is, in reality, the greatest struggle. How easy it is to abuse someone physically or verbally, but how difficult it is to battle against our lower desires and say no to Shayṭān's whisperings. We cannot accomplish this on our own, no matter how strong we think we are. It requires hard work to reform ourselves and also supplicating to Allah (swt) for His help.

Shayṭān knows our weak points; thus, we need to realize what they are as well. Just as a country will prepare its military to defend its weak points, we must also prepare our internal forces to defend our weak points against our inner Shayṭān.

6 Noble Qurʾān, Sūrah Āl ʿImrān (3), Verse 110
7 Syed Hāshim Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, Vol. 2, P. 259

A very effective duʿāʾ against Shayṭān is:

اللّهُمَّ إِنَّ إِبْلِيسَ عَبْدٌ مِنْ عَبِيدِكَ يَرانِي مِنْ حَيْثُ لا أَراهُ وَأَنْتَ تَراهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لايَراكَ وَأَنْتَ أَقْوى عَلى أَمْرِهِ كُلِّهِ وَهُوَ لا يَقْوى عَلى شَيءٍ مِنْ أَمْرِكَ، اللّهُمَّ فَأَنا أَسْتَعينُ بِكَ عَلَيْهِ يا رَبِّ فَإِنِّي لاطاقَةَ لي بِهِ وَلاحَوْلَ وَلاقُوَّةَ لي عَلَيْهِ إِلاّ بِكَ يا رَبِّ، اللّهُمَّ إِنْ أَرادَني فَأَرِدْهُ وَإِنْ كادَني فَكِدْهُ وَاكْفِني شَرَّهُ وَاجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُ في نَحْرِهِ، بِرَحْمَتِكَ يا أَرْحَمَ الرّاحِمينَ وَصَلّى اللهُ عَلى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ الطّاهِرينَ

Allāhumma inna iblīsa ʿabdun min ʿabīdika yarānī min ḥaythu lā arāhu, wa anta tarāhu min ḥaythu lā yarāka, wa anta aqwā ʿalā amrihi kullihi wa huwa lā yaqwā ʿalā shayʾin min amrik, Allāhumma faʾanā astaʿīnu bika ʿalayhi yā Rabbī faʾinnī lā ṭāqata lī bihi wa lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata lī ʿalayhi illā bika yā Rabb, Allāhumma in arādanī faʾarid-hu wa in kādanī fakid-hu wak-finī sharrahu wajʿal kaydahu fī naḥrih, biraḥmatika yā arḥamar-rāḥimīn, wa ṣallallāhu ʿalā Muḥammadin wa ālihiṭ-ṭāhirīn.

"O Allah, Iblīs (Satan) is one of Your creatures who sees me from a place that I cannot see him, and You see him from a place that he cannot see You, and You have power over all his affairs while he does not have power over any of Your affairs. Therefore, O Allah, I resort to You for help against him, because O Lord I do not have any capability against him, no power to change or force to enact, except through You. O Allah, if he intends evil for me, turn it back on him, and if he schemes against me, then You scheme against him. Save me from his evil, and return his plot back to him. By Your mercy, O the Most Merciful of those who show mercy. May Allah (swt) bless Muḥammad (ṣ) and his purified progeny."[8]

We must ask Allah (swt) sincerely to protect us from the traps of Shayṭān and to allow us to hold firmly onto the rope of Allah (swt) and the two weighty things that the Messenger (ṣ) advised us to follow while he was on his deathbed: the Qurʾān and the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa).

8 Ibn Durayd, *Al-Mujtanā*, P. 79-80

QUESTION:

Is there a difference between moral *(akhlāqī)* sins, religious sins, societal sins, and sins that break the law?

ANSWER:

There is a difference between all of these sins. Some of these sins may have the same roots or multiple roots. Some of them may affect society, as well as the spiritual growth of the individual who commits the sin, or it may even violate the boundaries of other people. Furthermore, there are different types of sins.

One type of sin can affect a society from two angles. There are those which society often does not see as a crime because the majority of societal laws protect people against physical and emotional damage, but not spiritual damage. When you commit a societal sin, you are breaking a law that has been put into place; this could include violating traffic laws, driving without a seatbelt, etc. For the most part, laws of the land do not contradict Islamic laws and thus need to be followed. However, some societal laws do go against our belief system, and in these cases we need to stand up for our religious rights when faced with laws that do not allow us to fulfill our religious obligations. Laws that prohibit the wearing of a head covering or ḥijāb are among such laws.

Spiritual sins can affect us both on a societal and an individual level. Among the spiritual sins that affect us only on a personal level are actions such as laziness that may lead to missing prayers and then having to make them up. An example of a spiritual sin that can affect both an individual and society is drinking alcohol. It is something that is often not viewed as a sin according to some societies, but it is spiritually detrimental, and also harmful to the well-being of society.

1 Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 40

Islam looks at the state of humankind as a whole and advocates for the physical well-being of humanity, as well as peace and tranquility in society. The contentment of the soul, tranquility of the body and mind, as well as spiritual prosperity is very important in Islam.

We need to understand that when we talk about sins, or committing sins that violate the boundaries of others, or sins between us and Allah (swt), all of these can have effects in this world and the hereafter. These sins will ultimately hurt the individual and one's success in this world and the next. For example, a sin that a person commits may harm one's health and ultimately one's future. Sins between people can often cause physical or spiritual harm to others.

We have various principles in Islam, and one of them is the principle (doctrine) of "honoring one's promises" — *ūfi bi'ahdikum* (أُوفِ بِعَهْدِكُمْ)[1]

From this principle we understand that we have certain promises that must be upheld towards our communities, the system we live in, and society in general, etc. Living our lives according to these doctrines are very important because adherence or non-compliance to them will either positively or negatively impact ourselves as individuals or societies as a whole.

When we apply for a driver's license and accept the terms of that license by putting our signature on it, we are promising to abide by the rules and laws mandated by that license. Traffic laws have been established through careful consideration with the intention of keeping everyone safe on the road. Therefore, observing laws such as driving within the speed limit, wearing seat belts, and not speaking on cell phones while driving, are all important and crucial because violating even one of them can lead to serious accidents or traffic deaths. An individual who is responsible for the harm or death of another person may be forever affected by that event—to a point that one's spiritual health will also be impacted.

SINS AND REPENT

Some religious scholars (ʿulamāʾ) have said that if someone dies in a traffic accident as a result of not wearing a seatbelt due to blatant disregard for the seatbelt law, then this may be considered as a suicidal death.

It is important to acknowledge that sometimes societal laws are in direct contradiction with the laws of Allah (swt). In some places around the world it is illegal to wear the ḥijāb, but that is a law that we cannot follow because it goes against our religious beliefs. In cases such as this, we must stand up for our religious rights.

There are certain differences between sins that violate the laws of nature and society, and those sins which violate the laws of religion. Some of those differences are mentioned below:

Sins pertaining to the laws of nature and society are violations that breach the principles and standards of nature, thereby threatening society and the safety of those within society. For example, drinking alcoholic beverages is a sin that violates the laws of nature and endangers a person's health, but it is also a sin which violates the laws of religion. An individual who is guilty of this act will be punished for violating the laws of religion, the laws of nature, and putting one's health and life in danger. Anything which goes against the laws of nature and society, or negatively affects an individual's character and honor, or impacts the modesty and well-being of a society in an adverse way is considered to be a sin and will warrant a punishment. Examples of this are sins such as gossiping, or not enjoining the good and forbidding the evil (al-amr bil maʿrūf wa nahī ʿanil munkar).

According to today's laws, acts such as suicide and promiscuity are not considered to be crimes, and in many instances they are not even seen as being a sin. These acts are not viewed as being damaging to society.

However, Islam considers such acts to be sinful because ultimately they negatively impact humankind's honor and morals.

These actions also indirectly weaken the foundations of a society and humanity as a whole.

The punishments for violations against the laws of nature and society are limited to this world, whereas violating the laws of Allah (swt) are punishable both in this world and the hereafter. For example, a thief may be imprisoned for a few months for one's crime, but someone who disobeys Allah (swt) will face the consequences of one's actions both in this world and the next. It is important to note that a thief who does not ask for forgiveness and truly repent will also bear the consequences of their actions in the hereafter.

The fundamental difference between sins that are based on the laws of society, and sins that are based on the laws of religion is that in society, punishment is based on an action that has been committed; however, according to jurisprudence and religious law, a person's intentions and thoughts can also be considered as part of that sin. This is to the extent that a person's motivation to commit an action is even more important than that action itself. Thinking about committing a sin is the greatest facilitator of a sin since thoughts then promote actually following through with the sin.

Tell Me About...Sins and Repentance is a textual compilation of Islamic questions and answers that are commonly asked by university students and relate to many of the issues that we face in society today. They have been addressed by a prominent Islamic scholar to give a holistic and spiritual answer to their concerns.

SPECIAL EDITION

CONVERT CORNER

Convert Corner is an ongoing effort to share life experiences from our subscribers. We strive to feature diverse, unique, and God-conscious stories that will provide inspiration and guidance to our audiences. This special issue features two different stories. This is of brother Mustafa Ali Sajjad's, a convert who is hoping for clemency as he serves two life sentences.

Could you tell us about your early life and some of the events that led to your incarceration?

My name is Mustafa Ali Sajjad and from the time I was 12 years old my life was marked by gang culture, drugs, alcohol, criminal activity, and violence. Heavily influenced by my peers, I developed a predatory mindset. While I never actually joined the gang, I was fiercely loyal to my guys and was well known to law enforcement as an active associate. I spent a lot of time in juvenile lock up for a wide range of criminal and gang activities including two commitments to the state youth authority for burglary. I was using hard drugs and well on my way to being an alcoholic. When I was just barely 18 years old, while under the influence, I attempted to steal a man's truck at gunpoint and the events that transpired led to my killing an innocent man. I was convicted of first degree murder with the use of a weapon. (I was) sentenced to two life terms without the possibility of parole.

What is your daily life like? What are some things that you do to keep yourself on this path of Islam? I imagine it can be taxing when one is confined in many ways, especially spiritually and physically.

I try to balance my days according to a saying of Imām ʿAlī (ʿa):

"The believer's time has three periods: The period when he is in communion with Allah; the period when he manages for his livelihood and; the period when he is free to enjoy what is lawful and pleasant. It does not behoove a wise person to be away (from his home) except for three matters, namely for the purposes of earning, or going for something for the next life, or for enjoying what is not prohibited." (Nahj al-Balāghah, Ḥadīth #400)

What helps me the most to maintain my balance is that I focus on the ṣalāh (prayer) along with its nawāfil (recommended units) and taʿqībāt (supplications recited afterwards). I also try to fast at least three days a month, usually on the bright days.

Finding Islam comes with its own tests, but finding the path of the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa) requires even more pursuit. How did you find this path?

My path to the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa) began with an encounter with the Ḥadīthuth-Thaqalayn found in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim. This ḥadīth resonated heavily in my heart and all of the brothers around me at the time were not able to explain it in a clear way to me without obvious contradictions. So I wrote to my mentor (who will remain nameless), and asked about the meaning of the Ḥadīth and the implications of it. The brother was not patient with me at all, instead he admonished me and criticized me heavily for questioning this ḥadīth and questioning his answers. I couldn't understand his reactions to my questions and was left in a confused state no closer to understanding. I spent many days in duʿāʾ begging for understanding, and during this time I kept encountering other ḥadīth with similar themes, which I asked brothers about to no avail. Then Allah, ʿazza wa jalla put a brother in my path named Muḥammad who gave me an address and told me if I really wanted answers to write (to this) address. So I wrote a big twenty-page letter, front and back, asking about everything I had found and its meaning. MashāʾAllāh, the brother responded to my letter, answering all of my questions in a very detailed way, and even answered questions I didn't even realize that I would have. It was profound.

This (brother) was Ali Tazarvi (may Allah elevate his rewards) and from that day he became my mentor, and eventually my dearest friend. It was under his kind guidance that I became a follower of the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa), and reaffirmed my Shahādah (declaration of faith) reflecting that.

From that day forward I studied and flourished under his guidance. I devoured every book I could get my hands on, growing exponentially with each one. I owe so much to this dear man and I pray that Allah, ʿazza wa jalla rewards his gentle soul with the most wonderful levels of the Garden (of Paradise).

May Allah (swt) accept all of your efforts as well as that of your beloved mentor. How has your life changed since finding the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa)? What changes did you see in yourself?

My life changed significantly after being guided to the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa). I used to struggle with drugs and alcohol (yes, these things are prevalent in prison), and my prayers lacked strength, but when I began following the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa) (and) applying their instructions, all of this changed quickly. I found a reserve of strength through duʿāʾ (supplication) that helped me overcome my drug addiction (and) I've been sober since 1996. Alḥamdulillāh (All praise is for Allah).

I (also) had a lot of anger issues about my sentence, being in prison, and depression. Through prayer (ṣalāh) and the duʿāʾ of the Aʾimmah (ʿa), I was able to overcome these issues as well. Alḥamdulillāh. I continue to grow and am engaged in an ongoing struggle against my lower self.

Without the Holy Prophet (ṣ) and his purified household (ʿa) Al-Islam remains incomplete, a puzzle you can never assemble because its most essential pieces are missing.

The Ahlul Bayt (ʿa) and their companions have amazing life stories. Do you relate to any or gravitate towards any one figure? Why?

How can we choose one diamond in a sea of diamonds? Each of our Aʾimmah (ʿa) and their companions endured hardships and are sources of inspiration we learn from. I think depending on where we are in terms of faith and practice we will at different times gravitate towards the experiences of each of the Aʾimmah (ʿa) and draw lessons and guidance from their lives. For me lately, the ladies of Karbalāʾ, the survivors of this tragedy, have been inspirational in that despite the tremendous losses each endured, they found greater faith and a boldness in the face of the tyrants and their allies. I am so impressed by their strength.

> "Our faith is not merely a cultural ornament, or birthright, it is a divine gift that requires our intentions, our attention, and our actions to shine brightly."

Can you share what challenges you face today?

Some of my biggest challenges today are countering the growing influx of Salafī ideology and literature in this system. They are outpacing us in their daʿwah (outreach), reaching too many brothers before they even get to the prison, while they are still in the jails. Our task remains difficult due to the ebb and flow of inmates in and out the system; when we make headway with brothers, they're gone in a flash and we have a new crop of brothers to work with.

What words of advice can you give to other inmates in times of hardship? Along that same vein, is there a duʿāʾ or verse (āyah) of the Qurʾān that you connect to? Why?

*I*f I could give a piece of advice to my brothers, (it is that) when things get tough, focus on the ṣalāh and duʿāʾ. Never neglect them for any reason: maintain consistency and see how Allah, ʿazza wa jalla brings relief and opens ways for us.

Among (the) duʿās from the Aʾimmah (ʿa), my go-to are Duʿāʾ Al-ʿAdīlah and Duʿāʾ At-Tawassul. I've found them to be most effective.

Among āyātul-Qurʾān, when in difficulty I recite Verse 286 of Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), Verse 51 of Sūrah at-Tawbah (9) and Verse 42 of Sūrah al-Aʿrāf (7).

The youth in our communities today face unprecedented pressures and societal ills. What wisdom can you offer them specifically in light of their struggles?

Remember that whatever you are dealing with is temporary, it may not feel like it in the moment, but everything has an end. We have to be strong in the face of adversaries knowing that Allah (swt) is always with us and that relief is coming.

Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) has said: *"But Allah (swt) tries His servants with various tribulations, renders them to worship Him through struggles, tests them with various types of distresses, all in order to extract pride out from their hearts, and settle humbleness in their souls, and in order to make all these open doors to His Grace and easy means to His pardon." (Mīzān al-Ḥikmah, P. 648, Ḥadīth #24)*

Do you have a message for the broader Muslim community?

Don't wait until you're tested and put under trial to be grateful for the blessing of your guidance and the bounties you receive. So many of us do not appreciate the divine gift of our religion (Al-Islam) and how fortunate we are to have been invited to become the followers of the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa). Our faith is not merely a cultural ornament, or birthright, it is a divine gift that requires our intentions, our attention, and our actions to shine brightly. Let us be grateful for this Divine gift of īmān (belief) and properly express that gratitude through our obedience to Allah, ʿazza wa jalla, and His most exalted Messenger, Muḥammad (ṣ).

What book has inspired you?

I have been blessed to read so many wonderful and inspiring books that it would be impossible to narrow it down to one (excepting of course the Holy Qurʾān). I will say that I've recently been inspired by the books *"ʿUddat al-Dāʿī"* and *"The Last Luminary and Ways to Delve Into the Light"*.

When will your sentence end and what do you hope for life to look like after? If not applicable, what would you like your future spiritual life in prison to look like?

Despite currently serving two consecutive life terms without the possibility of parole and ten years, hope endures. In my state, there is an Executive Clemency Board (that offers pardon) where I may petition for a commutation of my existing sentences to something lesser that would allow for parole. I have been actively petitioning for the last twelve years. This year I have the support of a prison advocacy group that is active with our State legislators, and a potential ally who is an attorney. We remain hopeful that Allah's help will come, *inshāʾAllāh* (God-willing). Given the chance of parole, I want to be involved in outreach programs and mentor troubled youth from within a local ummah (community). I also want to continue to reach back to the prisons and help with the daʿwah efforts there.

There is so much work to do in anticipation of the return of our Imām *(ʿajjalallāhu taʿālā farajahush-Sharīf)* and I want to be active in all of those efforts, *inshāʾAllāh*.

Seeking Refuge

Aṣ-Ṣaḥīfah as-Sajjādiyyah is a compilation of supplications from Imām ʿAlī as-Sajjād Zaynul ʿĀbidīn (ʿa), the great grandson of Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ). It is a compilation that appeals to believers in a multitude of their differing states and circumstances. A small review of the supplications will reveal the varying topics and their timeless relevance to the believer's life.

His Supplication in Seeking Refuge from Hateful Things, Bad Moral Qualities, and Blameworthy Acts, Duʿāʾ 8 by Imām as-Sajjād (ʿa)

أَللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ هَيَجَانِ الْحِرْصِ،

O Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from the agitation of greed,

Allāhumma innī aʿūdhu bika min hayajānil-ḥirṣ,

وَسَوْرَةِ الغَضَبِ، وَغَلَبَةِ الْحَسَدِ، وضَعْفِ الصَّبْرِ،

The violence of anger, the domination of envy,
the frailty of patience,

Wa sawratil-ghaḍab, wa ghalabatil-ḥasad, wa ḍaʿfiṣ-ṣabr,

وَقِلَّةِ الْقَنَاعَةِ، وَشَكَاسَةِ الْخُلُقِ، وَإِلْحَاحِ الشَّهْوَةِ،

The lack of contentment, surliness of character,
urgency of desire,

Wa qillatil-qanāʿah, wa shakāsatil-khuluq, wa ilḥāḥish-shahwah,

وَمَلَكَةِ الْحَمِيَّةِ، وَمُتَابَعَةِ الْهَوَى، وَمُخَالَفَةِ الْهُدَى،

A disposition of vehemence, following caprice,
opposing guidance,

Wa malakatil-ḥamiyyah, wa mutābaʿatil-hawā, wa mukhālafatil-hudā,

وَسِنَةِ الْغَفْلَةِ، وَتَعَاطِي الْكُلْفَةِ، وَإِيْثَارِ الْبَاطِلِ عَلَى الْحَقِّ،

The sleeping of heedlessness, undertaking the arduous,
preferring falsehood over truth,

Wa sinatil-ghaflah, wa taʿāṭil-kulfah, wa īthāril-bāṭili ʿalal-ḥaqq,

وَالإِصْرَارِ عَلَى الْمَأْثَمِ، وَاسْتِصْغَارِ الْمَعْصِيَةِ وَاسْتِكْثَارِ الطَّاعَةِ،

Persisting in sin, making little of disobedience,
making much of obedience,

Wal-iṣrāri ʿalal-maʾtham, was-tiṣghāril-maʿṣiyati was-tikthāriṭ-ṭāʿah,

وَمُبَاهَاةِ الْمُكْثِرِينَ وَالإِزْرَاءِ بِالْمُقِلِّينَ، وَسُوءِ الْوِلاَيَةِ لِمَنْ تَحْتَ أَيْدِينَا،

Vying with the wealthy, disparaging the poor,
not protecting those whom we are responsible for,

Wa mubāhātil-mukthirīna wal-izrāʾi bil-muqillīn,
wa sūʾil-wilāyati liman taḥta aydīnā,

وَتَرْكِ الشُّكْرِ لِمَنِ اصْطَنَعَ الْعَارِفَةَ عِنْدَنَا،

Failing to thank those who have done good to us,
aiding a wrongdoer,

Wa tarkish-shukri limaniṣ-ṭanaʿal-ʿārifata ʿindanā,

أَوْ أَنْ نَعْضُدَ ظَالِماً أَوْ نَخْذُلَ مَلْهُوفاً، أَوْ نَرُومَ مَا لَيْسَ لَنَا بِحَقّ،

Abandoning someone troubled,
wanting what is not rightfully ours,

Aw an naʿḍuda ẓāliman aw nakhdhula malhūfā,
aw narūma mā laysa lanā biḥaqq,

أَوْ نَقُولَ فِي الْعِلْمِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ

And speaking about knowledge without knowing,

Aw naqūla fīl-ʿilmi bighayri ʿilm.

وَنَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ نَنْطَوِيَ عَلَى غِشِّ أَحَدٍ،

We seek refugee in Thee from harboring
dishonesty toward anyone,

Wa naʿūdhu bika an nanṭawiya ʿalā ghishshi aḥad,

وَأَنْ نُعْجَبَ بِأَعْمَالِنَا وَنَمُدَّ فِي آمَالِنَا

Being pleased with our actions,
and stretching out our expectations,

Wa an nuʿjaba biʿaʿmālinā wa namudda fī āmālinā.

وَنَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ سُوءِ السَّرِيرَةِ وَاحْتِقَارِ الصَّغِيرَةِ،

We seek refuge in Thee from ill-mindness,
looking down on those we perceive to be lower than us,

Wa naʿūdhu bika min sūʾis-sarīrati waḥ-tiqāriṣ-ṣaghīrah,

وَأَنْ يَسْتَحْوِذَ عَلَيْنَا الشَّيْطَانُ أَوْ يَنْكُبَنَا الزَّمَانُ، أَوْ يَتَهَضَّمَنَا السُّلْطَانُ،

From Satan gaining mastery over us, time afflicting us,
and the sovereign oppressing us,

Wa an yastaḥwidha ʿalaynash-shayṭānu aw yankubanaz-zamān,
aw yatahaḍḍamanas-sulṭān,

وَنَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ تَنَاوُلِ الإِسْرَافِ وَمِنْ فِقْدَانِ الْكَفَافِ

We seek refuge in Thee from acting with prodigality
and not having sufficiency.

Wa naʿūdhu bika min tanāwulil-isrāfi wa min fiqdānil-kafāf.

وَنَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ شَمَاتَةِ الأَعْدَآءِ وَمِنَ الْفَقْرِ إِلَى الاَكْفَاءِ،

We seek refuge in Thee from the gloating of enemies,
being in need of others,

Wa naʿūdhu bika min shamātatil-aʿdāʾi wa minal-faqri ilal-akfāʾ,

وَمِنْ مَعِيشَةٍ فِي شِدَّةٍ وَمِيْتَةٍ عَلَى غَيْرِ عُدَّةٍ

living in hardship, and dying without readiness.

Wa min maʿīshatin fī shiddatin wa mītatin ʿalā ghayri ʿuddah.

وَنَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْحَسْرَةِ الْعُظْمَى وَالْمُصِيبَةِ الْكُبْرَى،

We seek refuge in Thee from the most dreadful remorse,
the greatest affliction,

Wa naʿūdhu bika minal-ḥasratil-ʿuẓmā wal-muṣībatil-kubrā,

وَأَشْقَى الشَّقَآءِ وَسُوءِ المآبِ،

Utmost wretchedness, an evil end to the journey,

Wa ashqash-shaqāʾi wa sūʾil-maʾāb,

وَحِرْمَانِ الثَّوَابِ وَحُلُولِ الْعِقَابِ

The deprivation of reward, and the advent of punishment.

Wa ḥirmānith-thawābi wa ḥulūlil-ʿiqāb.

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ

Oh Allah, bless Muḥammad and his Household,

Allāhumma ṣalli ʿalā Muḥammadin wa ālihi

وَأَعِذْنِي مِنْ كُلِّ ذَلِكَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ

And through Thy mercy, Give to me refuge from all of that,

Wa aʿidhnī min kulli dhālika biraḥmatika

وَجَمِيعَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ

And to all the faithful, both men and women!

Wa jamīʿal-muʾminīna wal-muʾmināti

يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِين!

O Most Merciful of the merciful!

Yā Arḥamar-Rāḥimīn!

SUBMISSION & TASLĪM

By Shaykh Mateen Charbonneau

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِى السِّلْمِ كَآفَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَٰتِ الشَّيْطَـٰنِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ

"O believers! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly, and do not follow Satan's footsteps. Surely, he is your sworn enemy."[1]

In the Qurʾānic verse above, Allah (swt) commands us to embrace Islam wholeheartedly. The word Muslim means one who submits to the will of Allah (swt). In order to do this, we must completely submit ourselves to the Creator and His Messenger (ṣ). This type of submission is termed as taslīm, and one who submits to the will of Allah is called a Muslim. Allah (swt) further emphasizes the importance of complete submission in the āyah below:

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِىٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

"But no! By your Lord, they will never be true believers until they accept you, O Prophet, as the judge in their disputes and find no resistance within themselves against your decision and submit wholeheartedly."[2]

When we submit ourselves to Allah (swt) and His Messenger (ṣ), this means that we accept whatever guidance they give us. This entails following every command and refraining from everything they have prohibited. In order to gauge our level of taslīm, we need to ask ourselves, do we truly accept what Allah (swt) says in the Noble Qurʾān? Or, do we sometimes feel like we have better ideas on how to live our lives? Do we trust that Allah (swt) knows best, or do we think that we know better than Allah (swt) and His Messenger (ṣ)? In order to be true believers, we must place the rulings of Allah (swt), as conveyed to us by His Messenger (ṣ), at the forefront of our lives.

In order to better understand what it means to submit completely to Allah, we can look at the example of Imām ʿAlī (ʿa). He was known for being fearless in battle—no one could stand against him and survive. Yet, his rights were taken away after the martyrdom of the Noble Prophet (ṣ), and the Imām (ʿa) did not fight back. Why is that the case? Before his passing, the Prophet (ṣ) had told Imām ʿAlī (ʿa), *"The community has a strong grudge against you. Shortly after my death, they will deceive you and reveal what they have in their hearts. I order you to be patient and control yourself at that time so that Allah may give you its reward and a good recompense."* [3]

The Imām (ʿa) could have disregarded the Noble Prophet's orders, fought against those who wronged him, and reclaimed his right; however, this was not what the Prophet (ṣ) had commanded him to do. Although it was difficult for him, the Imām (ʿa) remained steadfast in following the will of Allah. From this, we learn that no matter how difficult it is for us, we must never rebel against the commands of Allah (swt) and His Messenger (ṣ). Taslīm is when faced with many choices, we always choose the one that will lead to attaining Allah's pleasure.

1 Noble Qurʾān, Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), Verse 208.
2 Noble Qurʾān, Sūrah an-Nisāʾ (4), Verse 65.
3 *Peshawar Nights* by Sultanul Waizin Shirazi quotes the scholars Wasiti Ibn Maghazili Shafi'i and Khatib Khawarizmi who mention this in their Manāqib

Taslīm requires us to fight against our lower self (Jihād un-Nafs) in order to do the right thing. So, the next time you are faced with temptation, what will you do? When the alcohol or drugs are offered to you, will you submit to Allah (swt) and reject them, or will you give in to your lower desire? When a person of the opposite gender makes a pass at you, will you get involved in an illicit relationship, or will you fear Allah (swt) like Prophet Yūsuf (ʿa)?

When you lose the things you worked hard for, will you complain against Allah (swt), or will you be patient like Prophet ʿAyyūb (ʿa)? When your family turns against you for following the truth, will you break, or will you stand strong like Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) when his uncles turned against him? We must work on ourselves rigorously in order to tame our lower desires and live in accordance to the teachings of the Qurʾān and Ahlul Bayt (ʿa).

There is another example of taslīm in the account of a man named Sahl ibn Ḥasan Khorāsānī. This companion visited Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq (ʿa) and asked, *"O Son of God's Messenger! People are supporting you, so what is preventing you from uprising to recover your rightful share while there are 10,000 Shīʿahs supporting you and willing to fight for you against your enemies?"*

He felt that the Imām (ʿa) was wrong in not revolting against the government to reclaim his rightful position. Instead of submitting to the rightful successor of the Prophet (ṣ) wholeheartedly, he felt he knew better in this matter and wanted to give advice to the Imām (ʿa).

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq (ʿa) replied, *"Sit down, O Khorāsānī, so that I may show you the truth."*

He summoned his maid and asked her to fire up the oven. When it was completely hot, the Imām (ʿa) told the man from Khorāsān to go sit in the oven. The man thought he was being punished or had done something wrong, so he said,

"O Son of Rasūlullāh, please do not punish me and please forgive me."

The Imām (ʿa) replied that he forgave him.

Meanwhile, Hārūn al-Makkī entered, carrying his shoes, and greeted the Imām (ʿa). The Imām (ʿa) told Hārūn to put his shoes down and enter the oven. Hārūn complied with the Imām's order and went and sat in the oven.

The Imām (ʿa) then turned toward the man from Khorāsān and asked him in his language, *"Is there anyone like him in Khorāsān? Get up and go see what is going on in the oven."*

The man walked over to the oven and said, *"I saw Hārūn sitting comfortably in the oven. After that, he came out upon the command of the Imām and greeted us while the fire had not even affected his clothes."*

The Imām (ʿa) then asked the man again, *"How many people like this do you have in Khorāsān?"*

The man replied, *"By God, not even one!"*

The Imām (ʿa) then replied to him, *"We are more aware of the time of uprising."* [4]

We must realize that whatever methods Allah (swt) has prescribed through the Noble Qurʾān, His Messenger (ṣ), and the 12 divinely appointed Imāms (ʿa) are the best paths of doing things. We must make their words and instructions the template for our life. The one who created us knows what is best for us, and this is what we must submit to. If we do this, then we will be successful in this life as well as the next.

4 *Muntahā al-ʾAmāl, Vol. 2; Miracles of Jafar Sadiq (as) and also Miracles of the Imam of the Time by Muhammad Langroodi* P. 28-29

CONVERT CORNER

Convert Corner is an ongoing effort to share life experiences from our subscribers. We strive to feature diverse, unique, and God-conscious stories that will provide inspiration and guidance to our audiences. This special issue features two different stories. This is of brother Rasheed Al-Farooq's, a grateful brother who shares his story of hope.

Rasheed Al-Farooq grew up in a Hispanic community in Los Angeles, California. His letter doesn't detail the long lazy days of summer filled with sunshine and playing outside until sunset like many other children would. Instead, it paints a more vivid image that elicits sadness.

> *"My early childhood was filled with pain, suffering, and brokenness. Homicide and selling drugs are normal, like some twisted right of passage, handed through each new generation. And it's sad our final road ending with death or being funneled through 'the system'. For me it ultimately took a life sentence for me to awaken to what I already knew, which is sad. In 2006, I was convicted of a crime I am innocent of, but loyalty comes at a price."*
>
> — Rasheed wrote in a letter to our team.

While Rasheed pled not guilty, that didn't erase his conviction. This though, was key to the next part of his journey—finding Islam. He had found something to hold onto and give him strength.

"I still remember touching my very first Qurʾān, I was in L.A. County Jail awaiting sentencing, a Muslim brother passed it to me with a sūrah marked, and I read, 'Be sure, Allah will test you...,' and so on. I don't really know how to explain it, but it was so mysterious, surreal."

"We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient."[1]

The words

"We will surely test you,"

stuck with him as he tried to figure out his path as a Muslim.

It was not until an older Muslim handed him a pile of books, that one book stood out against the rest:

And Then I was Guided.

Ultimately, this sparked a new light within him and something more tangible for Rasheed to cling to—the lives and virtues of the Ahlul Bayt (ʿa) brightened his soul.

"For myself, prison has many struggles. The Qurʾān advises us Muslims to 'hold fast to the rope of Allah.' I say this, Allah (swt) purposely tests His humble servants. Fī sabīlillāh (for the sake of Allah (swt)), don't become discouraged if the rope (has) a few knots. It will only further and strengthen our grip, thus allowing us to 'hold fast'. Climbing a rope with knots is easier!"

Out of all the members of the Prophet's family, he gravitates towards the life of Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (ʿa), who spent most of his life in prison. "If it didn't break him (ʿa), this prison will not break me either." He advises his fellow Muslim inmates to always remain loyal and true. "Try your best to live by the examples of our beloved Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and his noble household."

One of his goals is to bring unity to the Islamic nation between Sunnīs and Shīʿahs, emphasizing the need for unity in the face of so much division. He owes a lot of gratitude to his Sunnī brother, Yayah Abdul Mateen, who facilitated his Islamic upbringing. Without him, he might not have picked up the rope of faith. He would also like to extend his gratitude to his Shīʿah brother, Hussain Ali, who has helped him gain his footing through it all.

Rasheed is currently trying to reduce his sentence under the newly issued SB1437.

1 *Noble Qurʾān*, Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), Verse 55

Sermon of Fadak

The Sermon of Fadak is one of the two famous sermons delivered by the daughter of Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ). Sayyidah Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ (ʿa) was the daughter of Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and Ḥaḍrat Khadījah bint al-Khuwaylid. During his lifetime, the Prophet (ṣ) gifted his beloved daughter a land full of date palms, called Fadak. After his death, however, the first caliph, Abū Bakr ibn Abī Quḥāfah, took this land claiming that it belonged to the Muslims.

When news of this reached Fāṭimah (ʿa), she went to the Prophet's masjid to face Abū Bakr and ask for her rights. At that time, the mosque was full of the Muhājirīn (immigrants from Mecca) and Anṣār (natives of Medina). Sayyidah Fāṭimah (ʿa) entered with a group of women surrounding her. A special place was kept for her, and she stood behind a curtain as she addressed Abū Bakr and all those who were present. When she had finished the first part of her sermon, Abū Bakr responded to what she had said. She then confuted his response using evidence from the Noble Qurʾān.

Though this sermon is known as the Sermon of Fadak, it contains other discussions, such as the philosophy of worship, the state of Arabs before Islam, and the importance of the Qurʾān. Below is a short excerpt of her sermon.

Addressing the Anṣār,
Sayyidah Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ (ʿa) said:

O people of understanding, supporters of faith, and defenders of Islam! What is [the cause of] this negligence in defending my rights and laxity before the injustice being done to me? Did my father, the Prophet of Allah (ṣ), not say, "A man is honored through his offspring?" How quickly have you changed, and how hastily have you betrayed us, while you possess the ability to assist me and the strength to support me in what I seek and pursue.

Do you say, *"Muḥammad (ṣ) has died?"* This is indeed a grave matter whose damage is extensive, its breach is vast, and its weavings have been torn apart. The world has become dark by his absence; the sun and moon have been eclipsed and the stars scattered because of his loss; hopes have been dashed; mountains have crumbled; sanctities have been violated; and all that is sacred has been disregarded upon his death. This is, by Allah, a great tribulation and a dire calamity; no tribulation can be compared to it, and no adversity is as grievous. The Book of Allah—glory be to Him—announced it in your courtyards, in your evenings and mornings, calling and crying out, recited and chanted, that the Prophets of Allah and His Messengers who came before were not able to overcome the definitive verdict and the inescapable decree [of death].

And Muḥammad is but a messenger; other messengers have passed away before him. If he dies or is slain, will you turn back on your heels? Anyone who turns back on his heels will not harm Allah in the least, and soon Allah will reward the grateful.[1]

1 Noble Qurʾān, Sūrah Āl ʿImrān (3), Verse 144

Far be it, O Children of Qaylah! Will I be deprived of my patrimony while you watch and listen to me? And [while you] are seated and gathered here? You are involved in the claim and are aware of it, and you are numerous and well equipped. You possess means and strength, and own weapons and shields. The case has reached you, yet you do not respond. You hear the cry, yet you do not assist me. Yet, you are known for your bravery and have a reputation for being good and righteous; you are an elite group and the best of those who were selected. You fought the [pagan] Arabs and bore pains and hardships. You clashed with the nations and battled the champions. We have not ceased, or is it you, who has ceased? You always complied; we ordered, and you obeyed until, through us, Islam was established and the milk of prosperity began to flow, the breach of polytheism was subdued, the ebullition of falsehood subsided, the fires of disbelief were stifled, the call to rebellion was silenced, and the religious order was founded.

So why have you become confused after your clear stance? Why have you become secretive after your proclamation? Why have you retreated after being at the forefront? And why have you opted for polytheism after believing [in Allah]?

Will you not make war on a people who broke their pledges and resolved to expel the Messenger, while they attacked you first? Do you fear them? But Allah is worthier of being feared by you, should you be faithful.[2]

Lo, I see you now inclined to a life of ease, having distanced yourselves from the one who is more worthy of giving and withholding. You have withdrawn into comfort and have escaped from hardship to abundance. You have thus spit out what you had retained and vomited out what you had swallowed.

If you are ungrateful, you and those on Earth all together, most surely Allah is Self-Sufficient, Praised.[3]

I have said what I had to say, being fully aware of your intention to forsake me and of the betrayal that has sprung in your hearts. But this was the unbosoming of the soul, the outburst of anger, the inability to further endure, the expression of the heart, and the advancing of proof. So, take its reins and saddle it, with its sore back and suppurating hooves, ever disgraceful, branded with the wrath of Allah and eternal dishonor, leading to *"the fire, set ablaze by Allah, that roars over the hearts,"* [4] for what you are doing is witnessed by Allah, *"and those who act unjustly shall know to what final place of turning they shall turn back."* [5]

I am the daughter of *"a warner unto you, before a severe chastisement."* [6]

So act, we too shall act, *"and wait, we too shall wait."*[7]

The sermon can be read in it's entirety at https://www.al-islam.org/sermon-fadak-tahir-ridha-jaffer/sermon-fadak

2 Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah at-Tawbah (9), Verse 13
3 Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah Ibrāhīm (14), Verse 8
4 Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah al-Humazah (104), Verses 6-7
5 Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah ash-Shu'arā' (26), Verse 227
6 Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah Saba' (34), Verse 46
7 Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah Hūd (11), Verse 122

The following article has been adapted By Nahida Syed in part from *"The Concept of Freedom in Nahjul Balagha"* by Sayyid Wahid Akhtar.

THE REALITY OF FREEDOM

Society makes itself to be free and just, but it is far from that. True freedom and justice is found with Allah (swt). Let us review the mainstream worldview of freedom and concept of free society.

According to the Western dictionary, **what is freedom?**

The quality or state of being free, such as:
a) the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action
b) liberation from slavery or restraint or from the power of another,
c) the quality or state of being exempt or released usually from something onerous
d) unrestricted use.[1]

In modern liberal nations, freedom is considered a right, especially freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press. Freedoms are often enshrined in the charters and constitutions of nations as foundations of law. It is also common for laws to restrict freedom in various ways. Different freedoms of different individuals often conflict, and interpretation is always required to determine which freedom takes precedence in each unique situation.

The paradox of freedom lies in situations or scenarios where the exercise of individual freedom can lead to unintended consequences or conflicts (this consequence or conflict can range from an individual level, to family, to society, and to national level). If individuals are granted absolute freedom without any constraints, it may lead to chaos, anarchy, or infringement upon the rights of others. On the other hand, excessive restrictions imposed on personal freedoms in the name of societal order can stifle individual autonomy and creativity. Finding the right balance between personal freedom and societal order is an ongoing challenge for individuals as well as societies.

If we examine the life of a common individual in present day society, we observe enormous pressure on that individual to keep up with societal norms at the expense of his/her peace, tranquility, and spiritual growth. There is an unnecessary race to keep up with materialistic belongings/possessions or fame of others. A few examples illustrating the paradoxical nature of freedom in today's societies are:

- **Freedom of speech,** which becomes contradictory when individuals use it to spread hate speech, incite violence, or propagate harmful ideologies.
- **Privacy vs. Security:** The balance between individual privacy and national security is a constant paradox. In order to enhance security and protect citizens, governments often require access to personal information and surveillance measures, which can infringe upon individual privacy and civil liberties.

1 Merriam-Webster free online dictionary

- **Parental Rights vs. Children's Rights:** This paradox arises when parental rights clash with the rights and autonomy of children or even when governmental rights given to children clash with the values parents want to teach children.

However, the Islamic concept of freedom and free society is based upon justice and fairness, individually and collectively. Freedom in Islam is a relative concept. Acting absolutely free does not make an individual or society free, instead this absolute serves as enchainment and slavery of mundane desires or pressures to be fitted in the norms of society.

The Noble Qurʾān contains various verses that highlight the importance of the correct sense of freedom and promote principles conducive to a free society, as Sayyid Wahid Akhtar has referenced in *The Concept of Freedom in Nahjul Balagha*:

The relation between rights and freedom is twofold. On one hand no right can be conceived without freedom; on the other, rights ensure certain freedoms for human beings. In the same way, rights and duties are also related to each other reciprocally. Every right granted to man saddles him with some duties. Duty, in a broader sense, means respecting the rights of others, which in its own turn results in securing a safer ground for enjoying and exercising rights.

Freedom of man implies that all men have equal right to freedom, which leads to a logical corollary that every individual's freedom is delimited by other's freedom. But this limitation does not deprive one of his freedoms; rather, it safeguards the freedom of all. If one is allowed to exercise his individual freedom to an extent, which results in usurping, or curtailing other's freedom, nobody shall remain free, and freedom itself will become meaningless. Thus, freedom in itself is a right as well as a duty.

Sometimes, duty precedes right; for instance, when a person knows and obeys Allah (swt) (both of which are primary duties of a human being according to Islam), he is entitled to certain rights. In this case, fulfilling one's obligation towards Allah (swt) bestows upon one greater freedom also. Of course, man is free to disobey his Creator (swt), but disobedience lands him in the worst type of slaveries, of the world and other men. On the contrary, obedience to Allah (swt) emancipates the human being from all kinds of freedom and rights.

Usually, rights are supposed to precede dependence and obedience, and entitle him to greater duties. It is very difficult to solve the riddle as to which is prior between these two. In actuality, freedom, right, and duty (or obligations) are three sides of a triangle, in which all three sides are essentially equal. If any one of the three is removed, the triangle disappears.

Islam has given equal importance to all three, which together form the moral, social, and political conduct of a Muslim. Realization of Allah (swt) and obedience to Him (swt) is the basis of man's moral, as well as social and political, conduct. In reality, these patterns of behavior that are named differently are intertwined and indistinguishable from one another.

Islam regards all different modes of human behavior as modes of an integrated activity. The world outlook of Tawḥīd approaches human behavior also from a monistic and unitary viewpoint. The purpose of all human activity is the establishment of justice at all levels.

Freedom is ensured in the Noble Qurʾān, both inborn and acquired. There is no distinction between a believer and a non-believer in this respect. What is prohibited is evil and what is lawful is good for all men. It is good and evil that is the criterion of lawful and unlawful, not vice versa. Those who follow the rational commands of God revealed through the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) are emancipated:

"(The Prophet) who bids them to do what is right and forbids them from what is wrong, makes lawful to them all the good things and forbids them from all vicious things, and relieves them of their burdens and the shackles that were upon them."[2]

This general principle based upon the inherent good and evil of things is universally applicable, and it is in this sense that Islam is the religion of (human) nature (it is Divine nature in the sense that it is ordained by God).

As we have pointed out, no fixed nature is imposed upon man, but he was created in the way he deserved to be. In this way, we can understand the true meaning of *"there is no compulsion in religion."*[3] This principle is further elaborated in other verses:

"And strive hard for the sake of Allah, such a striving as is worthy of Him; He has chosen you and has not placed for you any obstacle in the religion."[4]

"Do not prohibit the good things that Allah has made lawful to you, and do not transgress."[5]

All the Qurʾānic verses laying down the laws of just action are addressed to and are applicable to all human beings irrespective of their faith. Allah (swt) is the Lord of all the worlds, and the Prophet (ṣ) of Islam is sent as a blessing for all the worlds. Neither His Lordship nor the blessings of the Prophet's prophethood is confined only to Muslims. Hence, freedom, the greatest of all blessings, is granted to all men, and it does not infringe upon the rights of others; rather, it lies in unshackling from society's unjust pressures by obeying Allah (swt) and standing firm by doing good and staying away from evil.

2 Noble Qurʾān, Sūrah al-Aʿrāf (7), Verse 157
3 Noble Qurʾān, Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), Verse 256
4 Noble Qurʾān, Sūrah al-Ḥajj (22), Verse 78
5 Noble Qurʾān, Sūrah al-Māʾidah (5), Verses 87

Free Men

by Sayyid Ali Jafri

New York born, Michigan grown
Out in Texas, to get my diplom
Saturday morning on a dirt road
Pulling up to class, no ʿulamāʾ, no robe.

This was a place where the walls teach the lessons
And the faces you see, leave lasting impressions
The gate closed behind me, I let out a sigh
Men pointing guns on walls 12-feet high.

I entered the class, my heart felt at ease
Salāms, Kufis, brothers shooting the breeze
Handshakes and laughter, brought our hearts near
The sounds of takbīr, made my eyes swell with tears.

I taught the class, but learned the whole while
Lessons for life, I could write for a mile
Be thankful each day, even behind prison walls
Remember His gifts, stand up when you fall.

I drove home, having made some new friends
And so it continued, the lessons didn't end
Then one day I had to look up their criminal files
What I saw made me wonder, I didn't sleep for a while.

My class of Muslims with perfect akhlāq
Was made up of those with past actions that shock
So I asked my brothers, my teachers, one day:
What changed your condition, made you kneel down to pray?

A young man looked at me, tattoos on his face
He said, I read of a man, he didn't care about race
Didn't care if I was rich, or the poorest of poor
Didn't care I had sinned, just told me, "No more."

I read about his life, I was never the same
How he responded to hatred, how he overcame pain
I felt his kindness and mercy, his nights full of tears
He climbed spiritual mountains, but never forgot his peers.

I read the revealed words, they made my heart shake
Nothing inside me the same after a Qurʾānic earthquake
So I changed my name to what he's called in the heavens
But I know I must do more, to meet Ahmad on Seven.

I smiled at my friend, I nodded, I understood
It's not about your tribe, your money, your hood
So be like Muḥammad (ṣ), as much as you can
You may die in prison, but you'll live as free men.

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- Visit 2ndchancebooks.org/familyprogram
- Fill out the application form (once per applicant)
- Your first book will arrive soon!

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Inshāʾ Allāh, we pray this program will help connect our network with their families outside of prison and help them share the Islamic journey they have been on with 2nd Chance.

With duʿās,
The Team at 2nd Chance Books

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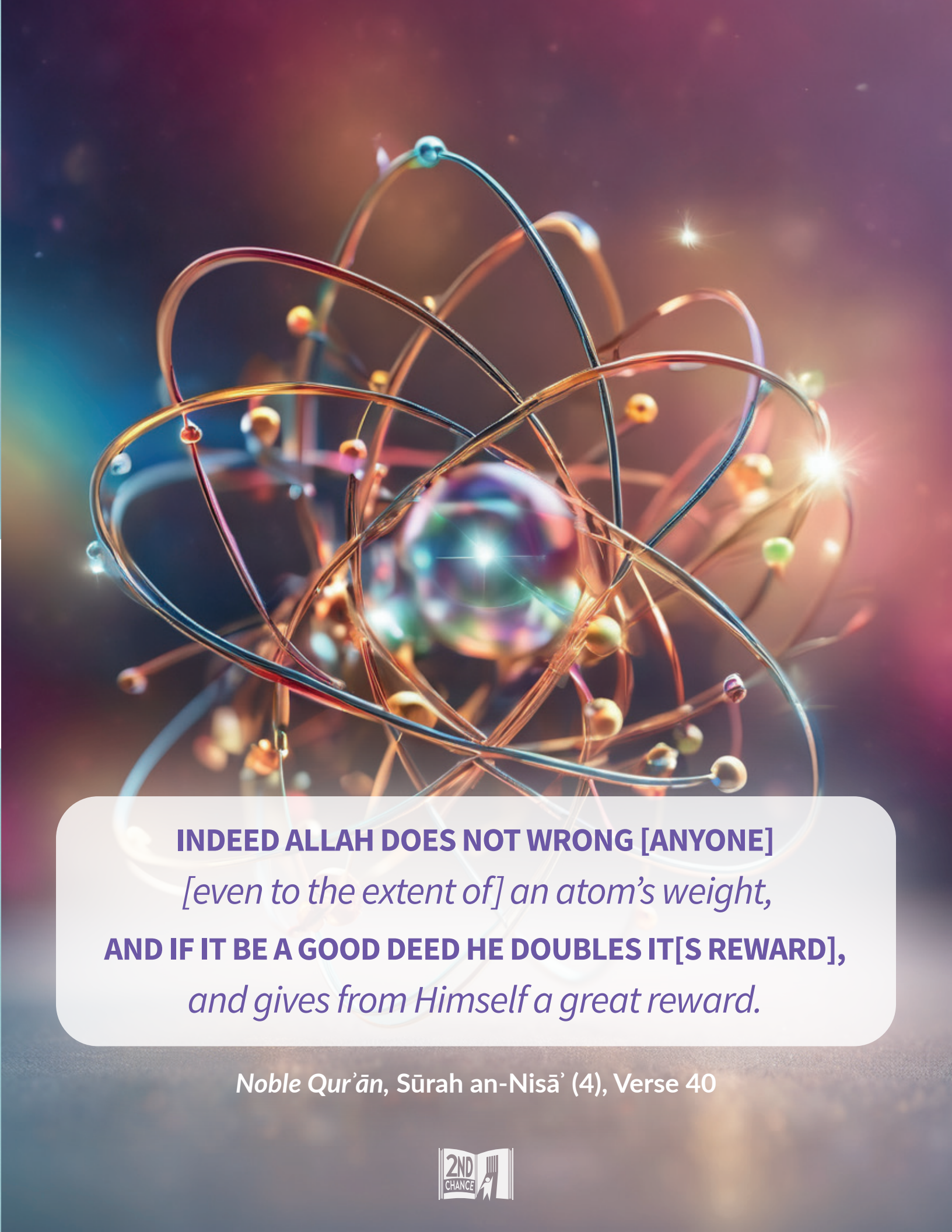

INDEED ALLAH DOES NOT WRONG [ANYONE]
[even to the extent of] an atom's weight,
AND IF IT BE A GOOD DEED HE DOUBLES IT[S REWARD],
and gives from Himself a great reward.

***Noble Qurʾān*, Sūrah an-Nisāʾ (4), Verse 40**

Transliteration Guide

Arabic terms in this magazine have been transliterated according to the following guidelines:

ء	a, i, or u (initial form)	ظ	ẓ
ء	ʾ (medial or final form)	ع	ʿ
ا	a	غ	gh
ب	b	ف	f
ت	t	ق	q
ث	th	ك	k
ج	j	ل	l
ح	ḥ	م	m
خ	j	ن	n
د	d	ه	h
ذ	dh	و	w
ر	r	ي	y
ز	z	ة	h (without iḍāfah)
س	s	ة	t (with iḍāfah)
ش	sh		
ص	ṣ	ـَـ	a
ض	ḍ	ـِـ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُـ	u

Glossary

***ʿUlamāʾ*:** Religious scholars

***Al-amr bil maʿrūf*:** Enjoining the good.

***Nahī ʿanil munkar*:** Forbidding the evil

***Akhlāq*:** Morals and etiquettes

Next Issue

The Unknown Partner

The Kindness of the Awaited

Spiritual Tracker